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24 Hours
By Stephen E. Snyder

the butterfly flaps its wings, right before
a bird swooped down and devoured it.
then a coyote chased down a fawn,
mauling it into a bloody mess.
an angry man beats the hell out

of his wife, and his son one day rapes
a sweet Louisiana girl. She never
looks at her body the same.
thunderstorms pelt a vagabond,

while the tornado destroys the
family's house, ripping it from the ground
like a leaf in the wind.
later that night, a farmer cries:

he will soon lose it all,
his once bountiful garden is
diminished to weeds and dust.
an ant dies underneath a shoe.

and a boy dies inside a car;
he screamed with all his breath,
begging for someone to save him.
wars rage, hunger starves, and generations

are lost and forgotten with cruelty.
guns fire, hate lives, and the
heavy sun beats down on this planet.
but in a quiet town, a mother
places her hands on her sick son,
and she gently holds him in her arms
whispering, "it'll all be fine"

How She Died: An Explanation
By Shaun Feilmeier

My beta swam softly through water
My worked-for money had bought her.
My fish tank was never too clear
For my beta to look in her mirror,
But after I cleaned it so thorough
My beta came out of her burrow
To fight that reflecting glass,
The end: She whooped her own ass.

A Moment
By Stephen E. Snyder

far across the galaxy, a star burns
thousands of years ago the light was emitted;
wars have been fought and won, devastating plagues have
come and gone,
generations faded into oblivion—and finally
it has arrived.
I look at its light in steady silence, and somewhere on this
rolling world
so does another soul. The past, our present vision, infinite
futures,
dangles in the sparkle of one tiny spec in the center of our
eyes.

Almost Empty
By Steven Kleinsasser

Compelled almost to combustion
Thousands in the streets
A Vision as clear as day
Flashing before those eyes
Stealing the day away
Daydream the night away
Nothing more than you
Find every feeling – Feeling inside of me
White bubble of Hope
You are my home
Hold me as close as you can
I've seen you
Miniature trees
Dancing in the sunset
Out by the bluffs
The falls in the rain
The canyon in the spring
I love you – I love you
The day will find us like fire to the trees
The night will light up as you walk by
Coming to me in that liquid time

ANTICIPATION
By Ben Barondeau

“God is a man-eater.”
—The Gospel of Philip
this evening

i have no
unanswered questions
only longing
an ulcer
of desire
boring through
my very being
alpheratz
shines
hauntingly
as does
betelgeuse
aldebaran
and a billion others
with names
i do not know
a trillion stars
a million galaxies
a thousand universes
but i seek
one blind god
who burrows

in black holes
who dwells
undetected
as dark matter
who speaks
the speed of light
i cannot
catch the words
let alone
penetrate to
their hidden
meanings
and
i wait
like andromeda
in anxious
anticipation
of being
devoured
mercilessly
or
swallowed
whole

Aurora Borealis
By Amber Hanson

Like the magic of that night
The colors all in mystic flight
We will mix through golds and blues
Sometimes we'll blend into ugly hues
Other times we'll burst with pinks and reds
And our future will smile from ahead
We'll sway and bleed and fall with speed
We'll burst and blend and our colors will mend
Like that night we might fade away
Only to surprise another set of eyes at dusk
from day
But with the help of the cosmos we'll shine
And show the world a magical time
Together we'll create a mystical show for all the universe to see
Just me and you and you and me.

Downside Up
By Lee Larson

At least for now it's over
There's nothing left to do
Except sit here and wait
To see if and when you're through
Different thoughts create different moods
But one remains the same
Inner battles and contests
Playing the "what if" game
Yeah maybe I should have
No it's better this way
But what if I'm missing something?
Did I waste today?
The answers will come sooner or later
Somehow they'll turn up
Needed patience, guide me through
This feeling of downside up.

FAMINE

By Ben Barondeau

comforted
or moved
or angered
vomiting
forth all i
had ingested and so
i close
the gilded
door
that once

had led me
through
to paradise
eucharist

untouched
unbroken
unkissed
waiting
and lay down

on the cold
stone steps
outside
and
starve

sometimes
despair
is my only
vocation
my only vow
my calling
and purpose
for living
then

how i dread
yet long for
the chanting
of hours
the flickering
of sanctified
candles
the light
dancing in
through
stained glass
that smell that
only churches
have
but i am

empty
illiterate
no longer

Living

By Stephen E. Snyder

The rose petals fall through the air,
Like little fairy wings, trembling
through the turbulent wind. As they spin
towards the grass, chaos erupts—moving left
and right, every angle, every dimension.
They are freer than clouds or patriots or birds
or death. Their once uniform beauty becomes
undone, as each petal separates in its great dissent.
The dark rose is painted lush crimson—
And so is my heart.

Untitled
By Dan Nguyen

There was a ditch, or a valley
That caught the rain just across the
Street; our street. I've never stood or
Longed to stand inside of it, except when
It did its job. For 8 years and more now,
It has served its purpose, empty and spacious,
Another beautiful, humble void; another
Something I never noticed when I wasn't
Busy at all.
There were cinder blocks that filled
The holes in the bottom of our fence. They too
Did their job, and when I yearned to kill,
I would lift their stomachs and smile at
The sentenced rollie pollies. I was a
Strange child, unobservant at the moment,
And the silent executioner in my undersized
Backyard, someone I never considered
When I was bored.
There was a soft yellow tint to the walls
Inside the house. She had been a smoker,
But I was never upset. They had started to
Paint above the wall that greeted you
Into the hallway, but things...they happen,
And the best intentions change with the
Swift charge of winter. The windows were
Cradled soft, but unnoticed when I was Grounded.
There was a hole in the hall closet. Near

The bottom. It was older than I was, but
I greeted it daily with a glance. I found out

It was caused by a man I couldn't meet; but
I heard I would have liked him, and him me.

That cave would beg to differ, but it
Didn't have the breath to object, so I
Let its memory slide unimportant when
I was tired.

There was a life that I took in stride
And believed would never abandon me.
There was a dot, a sky, and a sun orbiting
A small pink and white house that
Never meant much. There were hours and
Hours that I can't remember, and every
Child is afraid of the end of the world,
Which happens to fit perfectly under a Bed...
And after all of your years are met

With loss and despair,
And the tears have meshed in
With your grandmother's hair;
As the river you have cried
Swells up in its sockets,
And all you have left
Is that loss in your pockets...

Haircut
By Stephen E. Synder

her perfume smells like gasoline and
makes my eyes water,
she goes on about her day, asking questions, forcing
the awkward conversation of two
strangers meanwhile,
she continues to comb through my hair, snip.
She asks me where I go to school, snip. "oh I heard that's
lovely", snip.
last night, as I watched animal planet, I saw two apes
picking out flies from each others giant fur coats...
looking in the mirror: we sure haven't come very far have we?
snip.
she keeps going on—the kids, the husband,
the weather, snip. I just keep nodding and
agreeing, snip
finally we're done and she brushes me off like a
kitchen floor and tells me how handsome I look.
as I walk over to pay, I smell burnt hair and chemicals which
stings my nostrils. and in the corner,
an old woman bakes
her head beneath what appears to be
Goliath's spoon.

Personal Acceptance
By Lee Larson

Acceptable becomes
Hard to define
When applied individually
There is no line
Between what is and what's not
What can and can't be
Sometimes it feels like sandpaper
Grinding on flesh to me
But like the relief comes
When the pain is through
I'll learn to accept this
And start anew.

Lights
By Josh Kofford

With eyes I see them walking
On paths composed of processed earth.

I do not walk with them
Despite the testimony of their sight.
The path I walk is not so bright,

As eyes can be utterly useless.
I walk most of my life
In darkness on no beaten path.
Darkness on the edge of town,

I see the Lights from afar,
But never get the chance
To see a Light within my grasp.
Rarely do I ever see

A Light meander close to me.
When I do, it seems to me
The light fades as it approaches.
They do not see me wander on

For I am not a Light to them
Not one can comprehend
The thoughts in my head.
Their thoughts are filtered,

As is their world.
The unfiltered is transparent
In their processed minds.
Unfiltered, I am only known to

The wind and grass and stars
As I wander on
Seeing the Lights from afar.

Untitled
By Lee Larson

Two ways to pick from, two ways to go
One totally different, one the status quo

Change is scary, an upstream to row
Staying on course, or going against the flow

Old fields to harvest, or new seeds to sew
An already known outcome, or an outcome I don't know
Comfort behind the stage, or stage fright during the show
Sticking with the same routine, or learning how to grow

Holding onto what I have, or just letting go
Staying the same is a yes, risking it all could mean a no
But what hurts the worst is what I don't already know.

Ode to Guthrie
By Lucas Murray

I've had a hard traveling Life,
But Woody wrote it first.
a rebel that spelled his own fortune
out in Our Land
and in the
childish heart of
a giant
he produced and consumed.
The master
of the road
that pulled
the cart and
let the horse
ride on
his back.
The friend of

communist
formless
classless
labor.
A composer that believed

In a hobo's lullaby.
I've had some
hard traveling,
but Woody wrote that first.

Personal Acceptance
By Lee Larson

Acceptable becomes
Hard to define
When applied individually
There is no line
Between what is and what's not
What can and can't be
Sometimes it feels like sandpaper
Grinding on flesh to me
But like the relief comes
When the pain is through
I'll learn to accept this
And start anew.

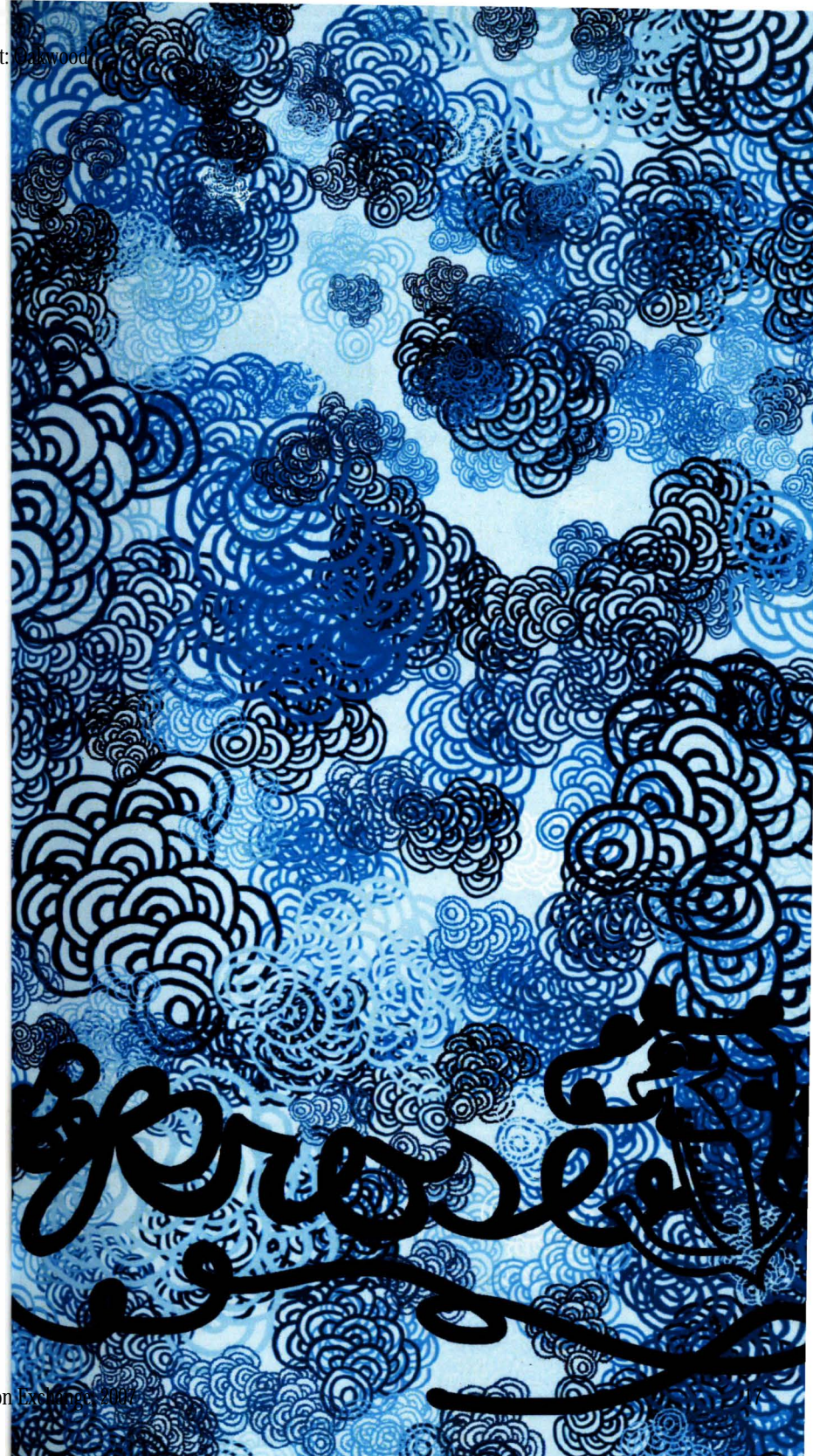
Sits On a Bench
By Shaun Feilmeier

An old man
Smoked a pipe
Whittled a match
Looked at me
And said,
"The key
To wisdom
Is to remember"
But what?
What
To remember
He always
Forgets.

BLACK-EYED SUSAN
By Ben Barondeau

black-eyed	full
susan	of
runs	pain
thru	body
tall	
grass	beaten
tall	and
	bruised
blue	
blanket	but
trail	longing
grass	longing
full	
	famished
of	
skeleton	for
weed	touch
full	emaciated
of	
thistles	flesh
like	upon
knives	flesh
scraping	starving
bare	for
legs	protecting
and	musclcd
bare	arms
feet	holding
face	and
	caressing

for	body
lips	beaten
tight	and
and	bruised
strong	and
against	longing
hers	longing
for	
	thru
him	tall
lovingly	grass
inside	dying
her	
instead	grass
	full
black-eyed	of
susan	skeleton
runs	weed
	and
face	
full	thistles
of	like
pain	knives



Deliberations of a Berserker

By Cole Lemme

The elders believe fervently in the old ways that incorporate a belief that one man might actually go “berserk.” This, of course, is the dream of every berserker; every berserker, save myself. According to the elders and to the prophecies laid down thousands of years ago, a berserker shall emerge every hundred years from the start of the campaign to destroy each of the seven nations that banded together to destroy our race, until the end of the wars. We have been fighting incessantly for twenty-five years now without seeing this anomaly. The elders have put into place a rule that we as warriors live by; everyone fights until everyone is dead. We have nothing left to fight for, or shall I say live for, save revenge. Our families, even the women, all of them, are dead now and the proliferation of our race is impossible, demise imminent. The last of the berserker race, our army, will not retreat on the battlefield. We are all given numbers, when the leader dies, number two takes over until he dies and then three until he dies until the battle is won, or until the fire of each and every one of our mortal bodies has been extinguished. Of course it has yet to come to this and legend says that it never will, for if the doom of our race appears impending, one of us will feel the blood in his veins boil to a degree unbearable. He will throw off his bear skin tunic as his muscles bulge to disproportionate size. His black hair will grow to great lengths. He will shed tears of blood from his scarlet eyes for the loss of his race and the lust of battle will surround and permeate his mind, body, and soul.

I desperately fear becoming the creature they describe as one who has gone berserk. A madman sent to kill with tooth and claw. The berserker in berserk mode will destroy all those on the battlefield with rash impudence and feel no regret. It is

evil enough that I kill out of fear.

Am I evil? I ask myself as I stare into the fire, only male berserkers surrounding me. The actual question should be: is self defense evil? First let me define evil as best a berserker knows how; the evil lurk in the shadows of life whilst the good do not fear the light. We are to learn this early on in life. Yes, we kill, but it is for a greater good and for vengeance. Whilst I do not fear the light, I partake in these nefarious events so that I might save my own life. The real dilemma I wrestle with is what we are not taught; does a virtuous end justify evil means? If the answer is no then I believe evil will perpetually occupy the world that we so desperately fight to conquer, unite, and rule with a just force, whilst we still have time. Second, self-defense should not be defined as evil. Self-defense is merely fear, but fear leads to evil. I often inquire as to what I fear more than anything. The answer that I would give the elders is the fear of the blood of the berserkers being lost and forgotten, the fear of dilution of our blood, or the fear of oppression by a race we should have overtaken on the battlefield; these are all lies. Whilst I do fear these things to a certain extent, it remains a lie as some of my other fears have begun to take precedence over these. For a time, I believed dying was my biggest fear, but I do no longer know it to be true for certain. I think I possess a greater fear of not letting myself know when I have lost my mind. I possess a greater fear of a tormented afterlife where everyman is forced to look at the stains his trespasses have put upon his soul. Whilst this is the case, I do still fear death to the point of killing another human being that wishes to take my life. But then when I think of my soul I wish not to kill and therefore should fear dying less. I am torn. To fight as a berserker, what a campaign! But to die will be the greatest campaign of all. This, with death, may be the correct thought, but until I am sure, thought it may be evil, I will fight for my life and pray not to become the berserker of legend, for the

Fire Starter

By Julia Tebben

The grass felt cool against my naked feet as I darted up to the trailer, trying to evade any oncoming thistles. Upon throwing open the rusting screen door and flying into the flour-caked hands of my grandmother, I must have surely caused her to think an imp had taken over the body of her little "peanut." My bleach blonde tresses were windblown in every direction and smelled of dirt and gasoline. I could feel the puckish smile extend across my face as she glanced down at my lack of footwear. "What has Grandpa gotten you into now?" she said in a tone half scornful, half amused. "It looks like he let you ride in the back of the cab again didn't he?" I decided it best not to reply as she pulled my soiled hands up to the sink.

"Why on earth are you so filthy?" she scoffed. The gravel in the pickup bed had felt like sandpaper against my skin. "Your hair is all snarled..." The wind whipped at my face and had smelled of soybeans and dust as the old Chevy guzzled its way down the gravel road. "...And where are your shoes young lady?" I took one last glimpse at the pink princess jellies before releasing them into the cloud of dust behind the truck. "They fell off," I lied. I had buried disgust for those rubbery rose-colored sandals since receiving them for my birthday a few months before.

Grandma continued scrubbing my hands. I could not compose myself any longer. "Grandpa says that we can light the lantern again, but I have to get the matches from you!" My voice must have beheld some form of utter desperation, and suddenly her countenance fully cooled as she paced over to the coffee table drawer and withdrew three charcoal matches from a small square packet. "I won't be giving you many more," she warned. I carefully placed each match inside my left palm, let out a breathless 'thanks,' and was once again

off the porch and running through the yard, dodging spiny dandelion plants that crept up in my path.

I remember the small tin shed being white with green facing. Grandpa was already waiting outside it with the lantern. Hanging by my grandfather's knuckles, coated with rust, I never knew the true color of that lamp, but I did not care. What mattered lie inside its tarnished hinges. He chuckled as I handed him the three matches.

He slid open the door to the shed and we both stepped inside. I walked to the center of the dirt floor and waited. This was the hardest part. Grandpa went to slide the door shut and then paused to glance over his shoulder. "Are you sure you're ready?" I never told him that the darkness inside the shed scared me, but somehow he knew. Perhaps he spotted the strike of panic that hit my face or sensed my loss of breath just before he struck the match. "I'm ready," I said.

Then, blackness.

For only a moment I could feel my lungs tighten. In that moment I recall being mildly worried that Grandpa would disappear and I would be left in this box of nothingness forever. But the sound of him pulling the matches from his pocket always reassured me. I heard a hiss and suddenly a pebble-sized flame appeared. It floated a couple of inches into the glass cylinder of the lantern, and swiftly swelled throughout the room. I smiled and saw that Grandpa had the same mischievous grin on his face. He blew out the lantern and I once more lost my ability to inhale before he lit another match and our cave was glowing again.

The third match met the same fate as the first two and I was soon skipping inside at warp speed to plea for more little fire starters. Grandma only shook her head and handed me four more matches, the remains of the packet, all of which died the same fiery death in minutes.

This movie replayed itself again through another packet of matches and I cannot say how it ends. I do not

remember Grandma running out of match cartons, nor do I recall Grandpa telling me that he was tired and we would have to quit for the day. Perhaps it was I who began to yawn and decided to sit on the earthen floor of the shed, unwilling to give up on the adventure. Maybe my eyelids got the best of me. I would like to think that he carried me up to the house in his big round arms so as to avoid pricking my feet on those thorny adversaries.

Today the lantern sits, repainted in burgundy, next to an old antique closet in my parent's dining room. I've never tried to light it. My mother has told me that I will get to have it for my own when I marry. I suppose a part of my heart is in that lantern, and someday, when someone is able to light that same fire inside me, I will get that part of my heart, part of my Grandfather back. Until then, I will wait in the shadows, holding my breath.



Meeting a Murderer by Colleen Zeman

Growing up in a sparsely-populated area, I'd always dreamed of actually conversing with extremely interesting people like those I'd met between the pages of a book. In my naivety, I pictured these people similar to those in my present world. They would be nice people, with trend-setting clothes and good grammar, but the stories they had to tell would be jumping off the pages of a book. My imaginary acquaintances would be problem-free because I wanted to be challenged rather than burdened by them.

He walked into my life on a day when I didn't especially want to meet anyone. I was enjoying the characters whose lives were exciting but predictable. "Gotta light?" he asked with a dangling cigarette and some missing teeth slurring his speech.

"No," I replied, secretly hoping his need to smoke would overpower him and I could get on with my book, but he sat down on the bench beside me. I found myself scurrying to evaluate this character. Was he friend or foe? What else was he missing besides four teeth and half of his right ear? He has lots of dark hair, so he must be fairly young. He's not that tall but he looks tough enough to tackle someone twice my size.

"My name is Mark. Would it be okay if I talked to you? I'm lost."

"Okay, I suppose you can," I said, trying to disguise the fear in my voice.

"Do you know what this means?" he said pushing his shirt-sleeve up his muscular arm to reveal a tattoo with an eagle and the letters U.S.M.C. beneath it.

I wanted to give him an intelligent answer so I mentally reviewed all my son's tattoos, but nothing matched. "No," I finally admitted.

"United States Marine Corp," he defined for me, "the biggest

bunch of killers in the world. They sent me here to kill a woman. She has kids. I don't wanna do it."

My mind was processing at a furious pace. I didn't want to say the wrong thing, after all I was a woman and I had kids. That couldn't possibly be true. The military wouldn't hurt an innocent female. Maybe she isn't innocent. Maybe she's evil and should be destroyed. Why would I think that? I've never met her and don't know a thing about her. Killing is wrong. Mark must be delusional, that's the only thing that makes sense.

"I'm from San Diego. Where are you from?"

he asked politely.

I know I've seen a Navy base in San Diego. Could there be a Marine base too? It sounds logical but I don't want Mark to be right about anything, "--South Dakota."

"You're a long way from home," he speculated, slightly inaccurately.

"You're further," I countered, hoping the conversation would stay in safe territory. There were people around that I could call to help me if I needed to, so I decided to focus on Mark, hoping that I could think of some way to help him.

"I'm lost," he stated simply and honestly.

Somehow I knew he wasn't talking about driving directions. I wish he was. I've always felt directionally challenged and shied away from giving directions, but in this situation I would rather go down that road. Instead I steered towards uncharted territory because I knew he needed help. "Have you ever thought about seeking guidance from a

higher power?"

"You mean God?" he questioned.

"Yes, I believe he's all-knowing and all-powerful. He could really he could really help you." I stated, hoping he

would at least think about what I'd said.

"I went to a church this morning."

"Did you talk to anyone there?"

"A nun told me I was drunk."

That thought had occurred to me too but I didn't want to give in to the obvious and miss the truth. Are all of his thoughts flowing from booze or drugs? Is there some bit of truth there? Am I prepared to deal with it? Could I really prevent a murder? My personal fear was replaced with concern for Mark. "Don't do it," I gently pleaded.

"I don't want to."

"I'll pray for you."

"Thanks."

We both sat there a while, not knowing what else to say. The gravity of the situation was stressing me out, even if this was only a glimpse into Mark's fantasy world. "I'm sorry but you're making me uncomfortable," I finally admitted, realizing that there were no easy answers to give him and words of comfort seemed inadequate.

"I'll leave now," he quickly replied. "Thanks for listening."

I watched him walk up to a group of businessmen on a smoke break. I assumed he'd finally get his light. Was a cigarette all he really needed? I knew in my heart that it wasn't but I didn't want to deal with the guilt if it turned out that I was the last person he talked to before he ruined his life and someone else's forever. The characters in the books I read are never this despondent. The mental processing began again at a less rapid pace. Why couldn't I help him think more clearly? You're not a man, much less a Marine. You couldn't relate. Anyway, Mark's story wasn't true; it was all in his head. But he was a lost soul and you pointed him in the right direction. It's not your responsibility to walk every step of the way with him. Pray hard and God will put someone in his life that can help him.

met that day, admitting that I was a little frightened, but the conversation took place in a very public area with help close by. We joked about watching the news for "Murdered Women" stories. We both assumed that his story was fabricated. What if it wasn't? That thought haunted me the next day as I spent most of my time reading in my hotel room. Somehow the characters in my book seemed less exciting that day and reading in a safe place was boring. Being bored is better than being murdered isn't it? ... Am I really that big of a coward? ... Am I over-processing again? ...

The Soothing **By Dan Nguyen**

The rain hadn't broken since I left; and now I return ravaged myself, turning all the old corners as if they were new, as if the world were filling in before me. Strawberry stains on a white collar are the hardest to dissolve, but the storm helped I suppose, even though it couldn't wash my night away in any amount of rain that could be gathered in one massive blanket of wind. The dark was emitting a deluge of yesteryears, and I was soaking it in with every step I paused to take, myself a sponge for mythical climaxes.

I was leaning on the hood of our car, a grim smirk born on my face in the shadows. The sound provoked thought: that aggressive rain sparking off the concrete, and sizzling until it found its invitation into the flood. I sat as my eyes carved holes into the thick air, Mother Nature cradling me into a delirious reverie, recounting the evening with still shots, vague blurs of what had happened, and what continued even at that moment: the leaning, dreaming, and sliding down the roots of my own offense.

And I wonder in light of it all, when is the breaking point where it almost becomes pleasing? Does an innocent man turn savage after being bathed in countless acts of countless evils that can be found at any time in this place? Of course it was enjoyable: that place, those shadows without time and a swirling mist of cigarette smoke that we found ourselves in so many times before and at this night, our last.

That umbrella was locked in my hand, a rusty half-noose begging me to let it drink, but it just felt so right standing without it. I could feel the angles coating me with their starlight undertone while everything was changing, while each raindrop slit holes in the sky, ripping it into pieces. I stepped out of the car, gently letting the door shut behind me, and with

that, I left that particular evening behind me as a carving in my bedroom, only there to remind me what I've created and to stay focused on the next hour. I watched the puddles gather on the street, on the lawn, and at my feet. At times they would spill over into each other, creating baby floods and molding everything together, man and earth, night and now. I heard a train over the roaring orchestra that was tonight's storm, its horn aching a cry out that could serve as a medium for any point in my life I'd like to revisit, but not now.

I took one last look at E. 22nd St, and then stumbled over my own two feet when the concrete began to melt in front of me. I could feel the shutters lightly slapping the siding of our palace: clack, clack, and clack.....over and over again, its only purpose being to draw in the silence. Eternity let itself into my ears and mind, and I wasn't from my car to the front door but mere seconds. My hand gently caressed the handle, and I imagined the lock not freeing from the efforts of the ripened key. Not fortunate enough. All the times I wore the metal down in secrecy, so many times before that paralleled this moment. That key was no longer a key, but a dull diary that knew everything about me.

I stepped inside, and walked softly across the dying kitchen tiles, each footfall pushing a high pitched sigh out of the old floorboards that seemed loud enough to rouse all within a mile on this night. The windowsills caught the raindrops and showed them the way to the earth. Every ounce of moonlight poured into the living room, and I could imagine the rooftop bending under the influence of that nature, and punishing us for not maintaining the worth of this place. I cared little or not at all, secretly wishing more and more every second to stay somewhere else for now, forever. Indeed, this place was old, but not as old as my sin. Had she found and confronted me at the dining room table, she would have smelled it all over me, like a beaker of gasoline poured over lover's brighter sundress.

When is that moment in life where all the words

you've always searched for hit you with the weight of the moon? No matter, it never mattered, and certainly fails anymore...

I figured the apparent course of action would be to find my way to the shower, to purify myself before sliding into my bed sheets. Comfort comes in odd packages: a porcelain oasis, fresh from out of a waterfall stretched across a city, and into an artificial condensed version, and for what? My mind wandered, and I decided I would need much less before my baptism, conversion, realistic and smooth with a bitter bite and a smooth aftertaste. It had been a long night indeed, and a tall glass of anything should sedate my nerves long enough to collect the thoughts that had spilled out through my eyes and all over the dust that covered our floors. "Our"...it made me chuckle. Since when did I believe that movies could be interpreted without any exaggerations? All this was already proving too much. I decided that right now was a terrible idea.

I searched every crevice. Chardonnay...fig and apricot. Perhaps this will do just fine mixed with thought in front of a violent fireplace. But I was only fooling my sink full of dishes. I was a slave, not a connoisseur, and even they were not biting. I am an elderly man in a child's body, trapped behind an olive midnight, waiting for the inevitable, which is a tragedy in itself. The bottle shook in my hands like a thousand bombs had set off in my fingers and my salvation found its way into a long glass, and soon everything I saw was translated into something better. As I set the bottle back on the worn shelf, I caught my reflection in the window. My face had aged years in seconds, my tired eyes sagging down and dying, and the rain was giving off the impression that I was melting. Or maybe I really was.

The crescent glowed brighter than the embers, each lick of its dangerous tongue sparking a sky-blue wave straight up to flirt with the air I would breathe. Everything was a cold breath on my neck that pulsed and pulled at my conscience,

and I looked into the flame, beyond it and oh how I wanted

to know what it meant. I picked up different thoughts as sudden as I dropped the previous. Oh the endless lies I could tell to escape the lecture and leaving of the one who sleeps now, and oh how the cackling flames and storm outside are collaborating to form a delicious blend, a hell-song for people like me who stay up this late to hide from dreaming.

Maybe that's what I wanted: An excuse to run away. The moment had come where anything at all was impossible to match the dull repetitiveness of my everyday life, and I being of completely unsound mind, would pay any price to relieve myself from such stresses. Ah, I should've written it all down. I'm damned with this disease that I'm the type of philosopher who steadies in solitude, and trembles in the burden of his own pressure. I wasn't clutch, more a coward that hid behind empty wine glasses, knowing everyone could see through them. Was I not hiding it well enough?

Of course not.

I really should have fallen into a book, or something to escape this reality. It is hard to imagine that it is what everyone is striving for, an escape, a moment where you cannot fail. My cheeks were flushed and sagging, and the thoughts inside gave birth on my lips and hovered in the air in front of me, collecting weight before dissolving into the night and dying without a sound.

I pulled a piece from my abysmal library, half-heartedly curious as to what I could discover in this book I forced myself to skim. All the details failed to matter at the time. I opened the book, and sometimes, she would lie beneath me, accepting me, her warm thighs shadowed by my bias for warmer. I would fall to the side of her after our night winded, like an underpaid laborer falling into his own after a long shift, the sweat drying to his skin like a thin blanket. They loathed their purpose, and I understood as her thoughts would break into my own, begging me for closure.

Why isn't this right?

Everything's fine.

—What has changed?

—Nothing at all.

—You never call before you leave.

—I'm never near enough.

The taste of apathy is a light apricot.

Maybe my cynical laughter woke her, each cackle like the pressing of sandpaper. Maybe she could smell the alcohol after it leaked underneath her door to suffocate her, just before I took a long swim in a small bathtub. Maybe she never should have opened that door. Which one? Either. I turned to see her standing there, and I realized how she had digressed. Her sparkling features had succumbed to the heat of a thousand days that had torn at her bright smile, leaving her a cracking portrait of her former self. The universe had dissolved from her eyes, and she stared at me, like a tired boxer at the end of a bout she knows she will not overcome. She tried to get me to turn myself in with her coaxing finger and cold stare, but I couldn't lay with her to confess, and continue laying with her without cutting my tongue out and setting it underneath my pillow for silence.

Oh silence! It was either all or everything. Neither or nothing. So she pried while I let the water soak me in. I did not wash, I did not need to. Sometimes all a person really needs is water. I have thought that soap actually hurts when you use it to clean out all the skeletons in your closet. But she never knew, and I am not one to destroy my past. I covet the world's fruit, and I love it when the dirt collects over itself and itself again.

Get away, get free! She's right there, standing, waiting for you to explain yourself. Do I risk glancing at her?

—Where have you been?

—Everywhere.

—Who were you with?

—Everyone.

—What?

—No one.

The more she talked, the more inviting it was to submerge every ounce of myself underneath the surface of that clear skin, skating in my own and seeing how long I could hold my breath; or how long she could talk without taking one herself. It was seductive, the way I could see my reflection in it as her words were deflected by my carelessness. It wasn't even cooling. My bathwater was warmer, and the wine in my gut started to make its way to my head. I began to get braver, but who doesn't?

—I'm talking to you.

—And what of it? See, I can tune back in just like that. I'll always hear, and never listen until you tell me what I should expect.

—This is ridiculous, I mean, what do you want me to say?

—Well if I told you, wouldn't that ruin the suspense?

She shook her head in disappointment and knowing, and her thoughts were poison as I inched my own further beneath the water, my thoughts dissolving. It's funny how your life is an empty hemisphere and you sink. I felt myself slip under the ocean, and I let the rain become my cover for the night. She was watching, I could feel her eyes burning holes in my skin. The pressure was almost greater than that of the water. By this time I couldn't understand a scream from a whisper, and a whisper from anything at all. Some would pray for enlightenment when they are faced with any predicament, but you would be surprised how well a few muffles underneath a raging thunderstorm work.

Incoherence is an incredible aspirin.

The last sentence she let me have as a gift. The words sharpened to a point like a fine blade for slaughter, and hit with a mountainous force, bending me down like a helpless bush in a tornado. I imagined myself standing, and staggering to one knee, drowning in a sea of tears mixed with hers at my

feet. Then all too soon I was back to the water at the splash in front of me. All of my careful plotting, and I was still the fool to keep all of her letters with me, souvenirs of a not-so-distant vacation on a red island that was only beautiful because it wasn't this. I felt like dying, but not in regret.

There is a point when you realize you cannot throw empty words into a pot to serve it to others as your emotion. All you can do is feel.

She eased out of my room slowly, each half-step marked by a nod or an ill gaze, as if she was expecting me to submit in pity. I sighed at her biggest mistake and greatest triumph all wrapped into one gentle tug, and the shutting of that door. She would now return to bed and stare through the ceiling and try to swallow the clouds with her eyes and get away from it all, from me and my never-ending inconsistency, and the space I fill in this empty void we once called a home that has turned into my rest stop in between vacations. I would be soon to follow, once I turned thirsty for rest. But for the time being I would suffer, sliding back and forth like an uneasy river without dam; and damn this itching. I never noticed the yellow tint that bathroom gave off, like an olive broken into pieces, and projected upon the walls. The crickets let out their song, screeching, stopping, and again. They must have realized what they were near, and ceased. Everything slowed. The leaves on the trees withered and turned brittle and submitted into a fetal position, as if winter had forgotten one of its belongings before it had departed. The streetlights that flooded onto her sleeping, softly dimmed for the final approach, and the stars....well, they turned to gaze to

anything else.

And everyone knew.

When your skin starts to bend, and wrinkle while you wade away, you tend to get out, dry yourself off and come into the world again. I like to think of this time as the starting gate, an

somewhere else, and to never deal with the nightingale again. I never let my head rise out of that oasis, and eventually all of my vague and random ponderings began to blend in with one another like spilling bleach until all I could focus on was the nothing. The pain was gradual, but the life I was living was never-ending, and that hurt so deep I never stood a chance.

I let myself breathe her name, let the image float off my tongue and dance in front of me, strong, until it began to flicker and die under the weight of the air's silent embrace.

And So we slept

Together, two rooms apart;

One nightmare at its death,

One dream yet to start.

"Squall's End" Except from Blue Valley

By Joshua T. Bell

Blue Valley, Nebraska, performed like any other small town. Each family decorated their lawn perfectly, while the ones considered outcasts were those two who left their lawns tainted with weeds. Two bars opened each day at four o'clock in the afternoon and stayed open until two A.M.. The small town convenience store owned by Marilyn Brady rested in the center of town where everyone could see it.

The inhabitants of the town came from many different backgrounds. Although the town itself was small, there were designated areas for the higher and lower class. The five rich families lived on one side of town their houses and lawns always perfect, while the eight poorer families lived in the trailers on the east side of town. The rest of the families just set themselves down in between the two diversities.

The school was about a half mile outside of town, and everyone from the age of four to eighteen went to Benjamin Franklin High School. The adults within the town prized the small class sizes, but none cared to acknowledge the hierarchy that they had most likely been a part of. Nor did they acknowledge the bad behavior the sports-players indulged themselves in every weekend out on Mr. Schneider's land.

Blue Valley had a tendency to trap people within its fences, and it held onto them. People came in from other areas and they succumbed to the beauty of small town life. Others came to teach, and they never left the brick walls of the school house. Some people just never left. All, at one time or another, wanted to leave, but something held them back.

Each day was the same. Cars drove through the town constantly from seven to eight in the morning, but only the elevator trucks invaded until three-thirty when school finally let out and everyone went home for the day. Each day was the same, unending, pattern of small town life.

Prayers of a Saint

By Cole Lemme

No, we are not as Christ was and is; we are not divine. Although we do have the ability to heal and perform miracles as Christ did, we are only able through prayer. We are but a conduit through which the Lord channels his divinity. Technically we are not even performing these miraculous acts, but letting ourselves be used so that God, the Son, and the Spirit might work through our wishes and our crude material bodies in order to restore those that are in need and punish those who are wicked. We are however, given credit once in awhile as the angels are. Men do not see God and therefore they lose sight of who is behind everything. Too often have I been praised for only doing the work that the Lord has blessed me to do and allowed me to do. Too often have I been given the credit for what only He can do.

Once upon walking down a not so crowded sidewalk on the outskirts of a large town, I saw him: the first one I healed. He was inflicted with a disease known to man; something they would give a particular name to, but I know what all disease is and that all disease is only that: pain which I am able to eliminate through Christ. I watched as he struggled to walk. I watched as he limped down the street, as his face contorted in pain and depression. I felt the bones in his body ready to break and his heart ready to give in to the rough battle of the immune system attacking its own temple. I felt this man's soul cry to be released so that it might no longer feel the pain of this mortal world. I heard the thoughts race through his head; thoughts of pain, anxiety, depression, and most of all, betrayal. Then I watched him stumble, I watched him fall, and in that moment before he smote the pavement that would break his body, I heard him cry out in his mind: "Why have you forsaken me?"

I stopped time and space for a brief moment before he hit and every created being ceased movement, save for me who quickly folded his hands and bowed to one knee. In that frozen moment in time I took my eyes from his body that hung suspended in mid-air and shut them.

Forget the past of this man. Thou hath given him trials and tribulations beyond what many can handle. Not through my will, but through yours alone doth this man's fate rely. I know what ails him and cannot bear to see him suffer to the point of death without belief. Raise him up and heal the body of this man so that his soul might be saved. I release mine energy and thoughts to thee so that it might be reciprocated back in the form of divinity. Oh Lord, be a blessing and a savior unto this man as thou hath been unto me. When mine own time comes, may the angels wing with great speed and joy me and those whom I share a fate with. It is done, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the

Spirit, Amen.

And then time and space continued to move. The man fell hard, but it was not the pain that he had expected; a pain that might leave him there forever to rot and die, cursing the Lord for choosing him as this vessel of disease. It was a pain of his knee hitting the pavement and the pain of his outstretched arm with cuts on his palm from stopping himself. I stood then and pocketed my hands to watch. I do not know if the man knew that it was I who had prayed for him, he simply stood up, with ease, and looked at his hand and then his knee. He then smiled at me and tilted his head back to the sky. He was praying in that moment; I imagine we were both thanking the Lord for the same thing. He was healed. The lame could run, and run he did. I watched him run away screaming with joy, not caring who heard for he was well again.

That man did not know what I did for him that day but I do not hold it against him for truly it was the Lord. Besides, he

carry me and those that I have bound to my soul that they might not see damnation.

Together By Tasha Overmyer

Isis jumps onto my lap unexpectedly. She carefully treads in small circles until she is comfortable enough to lie down. I run my hand over the multi-colored coat of my calico kitten. She is so thin that I feel each bone like the thinly disguised ribs in a corset. Her skin is more like calico linen draped over a piece of furniture to protect it from dust than a fluffy coat put on for padding against the cold. The silky strands feel good against my calloused hands.

As I scratch her chin she thrusts out her neck and leans her head into my hand, closing her eyes. No doubt her eyes are rolling into the back of her head as the faint grumble of her little motor begins. The delicate white whiskers brush across my open palm as she lets out the tiniest breath. It is a breath that is perceptibly human: like a sigh. "I am tired," I imagine her saying, though the sigh seems more happy than sad.

Her nose brushes against my palm too. It feels like damp black silk. It is clammy and uncomfortable on my skin, but as soon as it is lifted, the feeling fades. Her still soft baby stomach moves up and down so fast that I worry for a moment. If she were me that would be the motion of her sides heaving to grasp at air that is too far away. That would be how I look after running up four flights of stairs; like when I realize that I have only an hour left to write a paper that should take me three. She, however, looks calm and satisfied, and even the quick motion of her breath seems relaxed.

As the sun goes behind a fluffy white cloud the bright sheen fades from her fur. I look up and out the window and notice how much like the fading autumn leaves her orange stripes are. The black splotches look deceptively like the distant green and brown groves of pine trees and the white is clearer than that of

the cumulus clouds that recently covered the sun. She is a part of it all in a way that I am not. I have removed myself from that world.

Downstairs a door slams and her head perks up as if she hadn't been asleep. In the sun, I can see all the spidery veins in her tensed triangles of ears. She listens for more noises and then is comforted by the familiar clicking of my fingers hitting the keys above her. She stretches out a leg from underneath her chest and extends her toes as if they were furry little fingers about to grasp at something just out of reach.

I pause from typing to look down at her. I enjoy watching her do the little things. I so often forget to do them now. Even breathe. I forget that every once in a while too. That is when everything goes hazy for just an instant and I think that the world is caving in on me, like the water in a toilet being flushed down the drain. Into where? Into nothingness. I am afraid of this nothingness. I am afraid that all of my efforts will be in vain if I let myself so much as breathe. So, I stroke her downy fur with my rough hands and continue to type.

She will sleep most of the day knowing there is nothing else she has to do. I will work well into the night knowing there is more to do than I can ever get done. She will clamor for her dinner when the baby stomach starts to grumble from her primal need for food. I will feed her and silence the clamor of my own stomach, knowing there will be time to eat later. She will again curl up to sleep, her warm body numbing my legs. I will flip on the light and read until my eyes no longer see the words, long past the point of taking these words in.

The numbness in my legs will finally prompt me to move Isis to her own little bed. Most nights I will at last shower and fall to sleep as morning hints at its arrival with deep violet skies and whistling birds. Like my Isis, I will start at any unexpected sound, immediately awake in body. The buzzing

of my alarm clock will eventually sink in for what it is and I will begin again.

To Love on the Fly

By Shaun Feilmeier

There was a fly in my coffee. Swimming in circles to avoid my fingers, she was hard to catch. When I felt her at my tips, I plucked her from the sticky, milky remnants at the end of my cup. Her paper wings stuck to her back legs the way a cooked piece of cabbage sticks to a soup's spoon. Her back legs stuck to the roughened black table top. She dragged them along as if she were pulling a truck of mustard. I thought she suffered, and lifted my thumb to squash her misery. My thumb touched the fly's head; I stopped when I felt her pinned body push back. She wanted to live.

Using my finger as a dropper, I wetted my speck of a friend. She panicked and tried to flee, but I was all around her; I brushed her wings with a napkin, trying to release the hold of the sugar. Not yet dry, she sat at my table as I blew on her the way one playfully blows on the nose of a lover. I even spoke. I spoke softly to a fly.

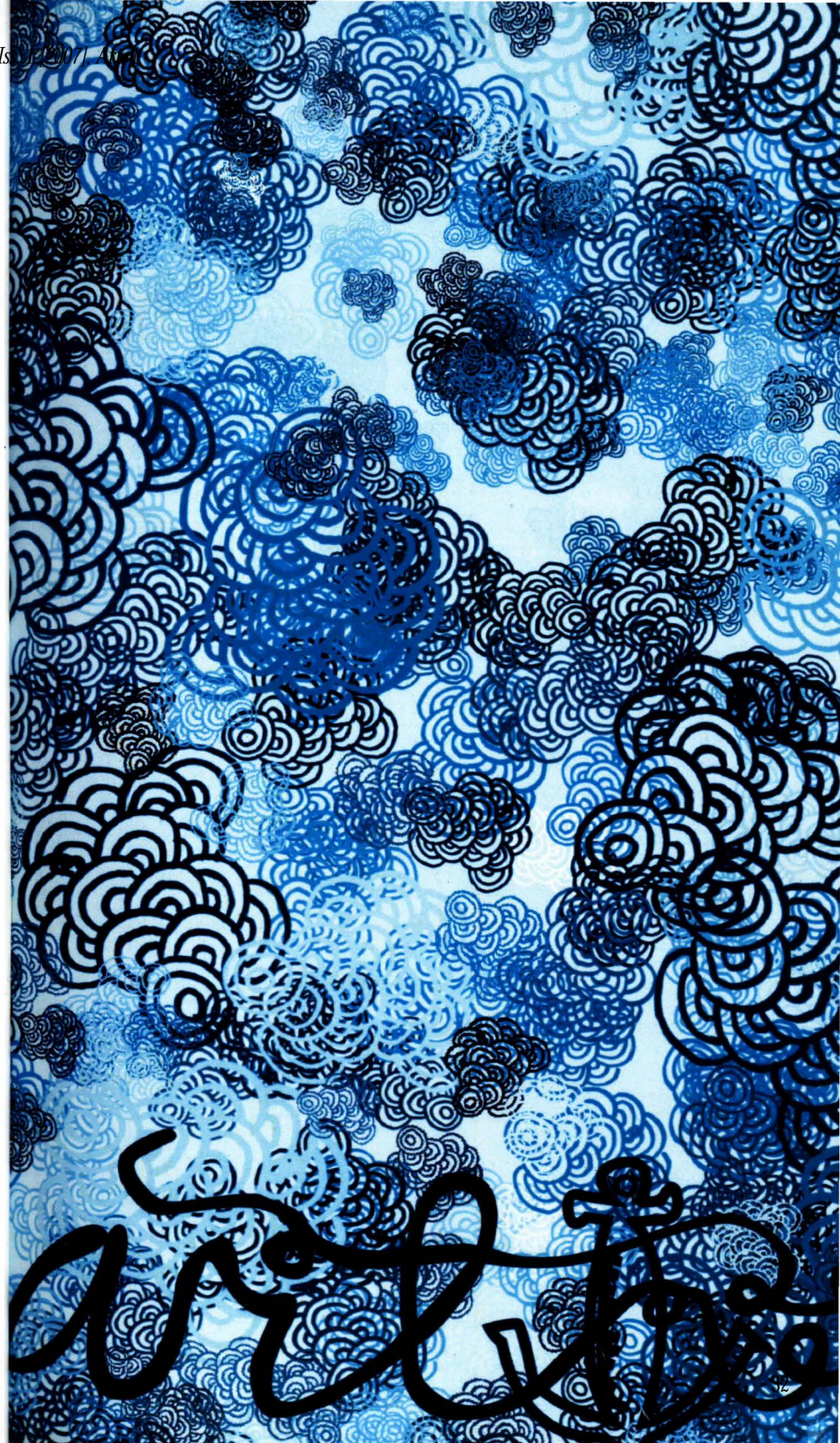
I must have said something right. She began wriggling and wiggling her legs apart. I grabbed her to help her dry her legs, but she jumped out of my hand. She struggled with her bound legs, and I thought I had hurt her frail, helpless limbs. At that moment I wished I had killed her. My helping increased her hurt and struggle. I could not have killed her now that I had gone so far; I watched her with agony. I may have prayed.

A fly moves about on wings more than legs. She needed her wings working not her leg, but she occupied herself with cleaning her head instead. Hairy front hands jumped to the back of her head, slid up the sharp curve behind her enormous, red eyes. Moving side to side, she wiped downwards toward her mouth parts, where she split her hands around them the way a woman wipes lipstick from the corners of her mouth. She did it over and over; I knew her head better

than she. Worried, I told her to clean her wings from her back. She did not listen. She never listened.

I hit my index finger hard next to her head. She jumped backwards the way flies take to flight but seemed surprised her wings did not move. In great fear, she pushed and stroked her rear. Her back legs, first freed, rubbed from the under side of her grayish yellow back upward across the hairs on top, until, met by the edge of her wings, she pushed outward with a sort of kick. She was kick starting her wings free. The very ends of her wings hung out like flaps. She raked her legs between her wings and back the way a butcher rakes a curved, two-handled knife between steak and rib. When she finished, they angled from just behind her shoulders to both her sides, the way a wedding dress falls from hip to floor—a bell-shaped beauty.

She turned and looked at me. I drew in close, breathing on her softly. I wanted to touch her but knew she would flee. I wondered if she could see me. She may only have known me as a prodding, meaty hand, but I knew her and mourned her leaving. I whispered goodbye, but too loudly; she flew away from me. I tried to catch her with my eyes, but she vanished over the wall into the next booth. Into someone else's coffee.





Five Cows
By Tim Steele

Maria II
By Eileen Hall





Self-Portrait
By Eileen Hall

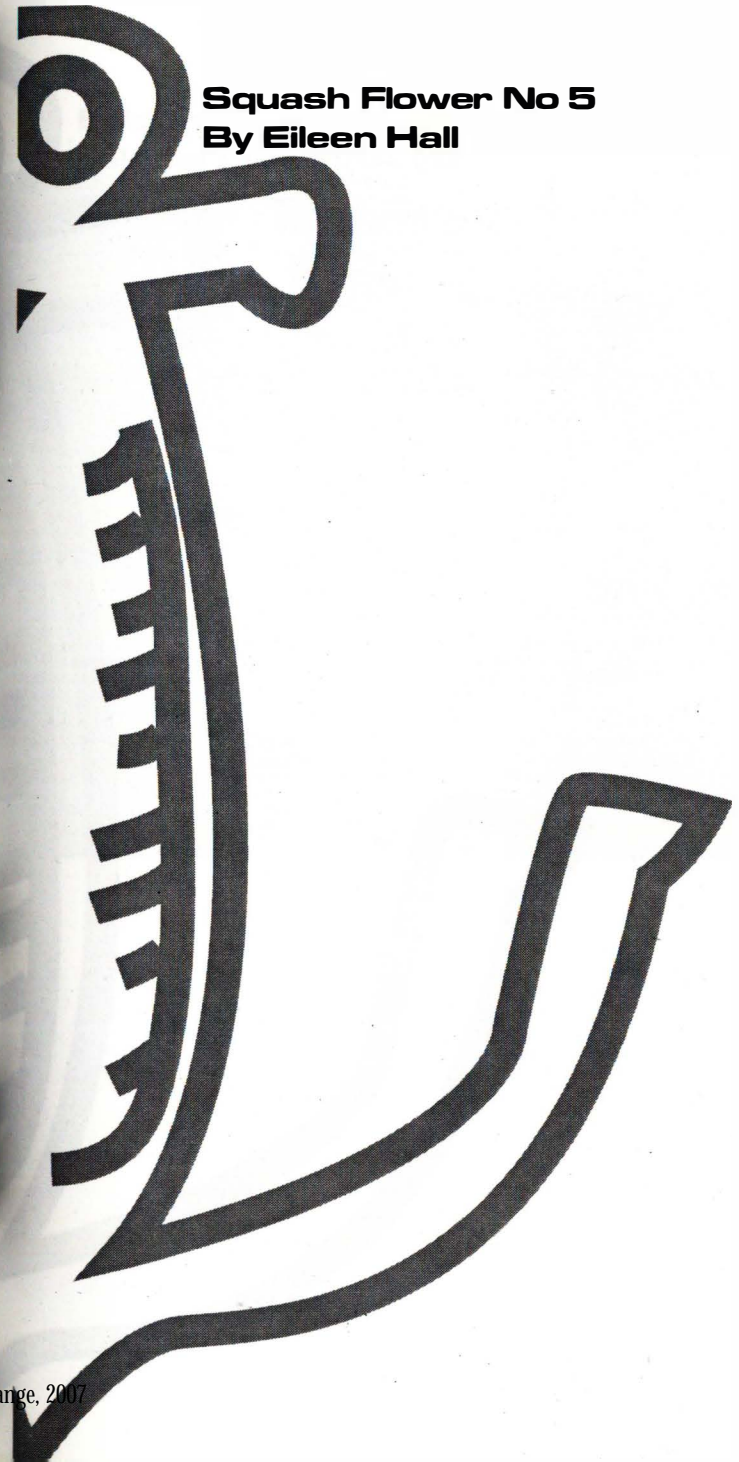


Squash Flower No 1
By Eileen Hall

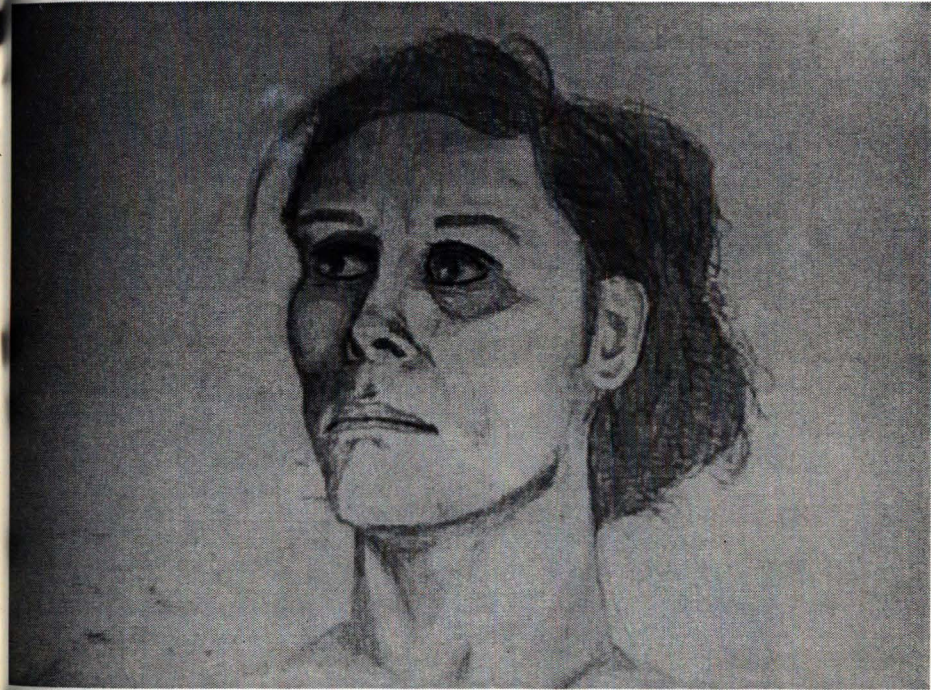




Squash Flower No 5
By Eileen Hall



Untitled
By Andrew Tischler

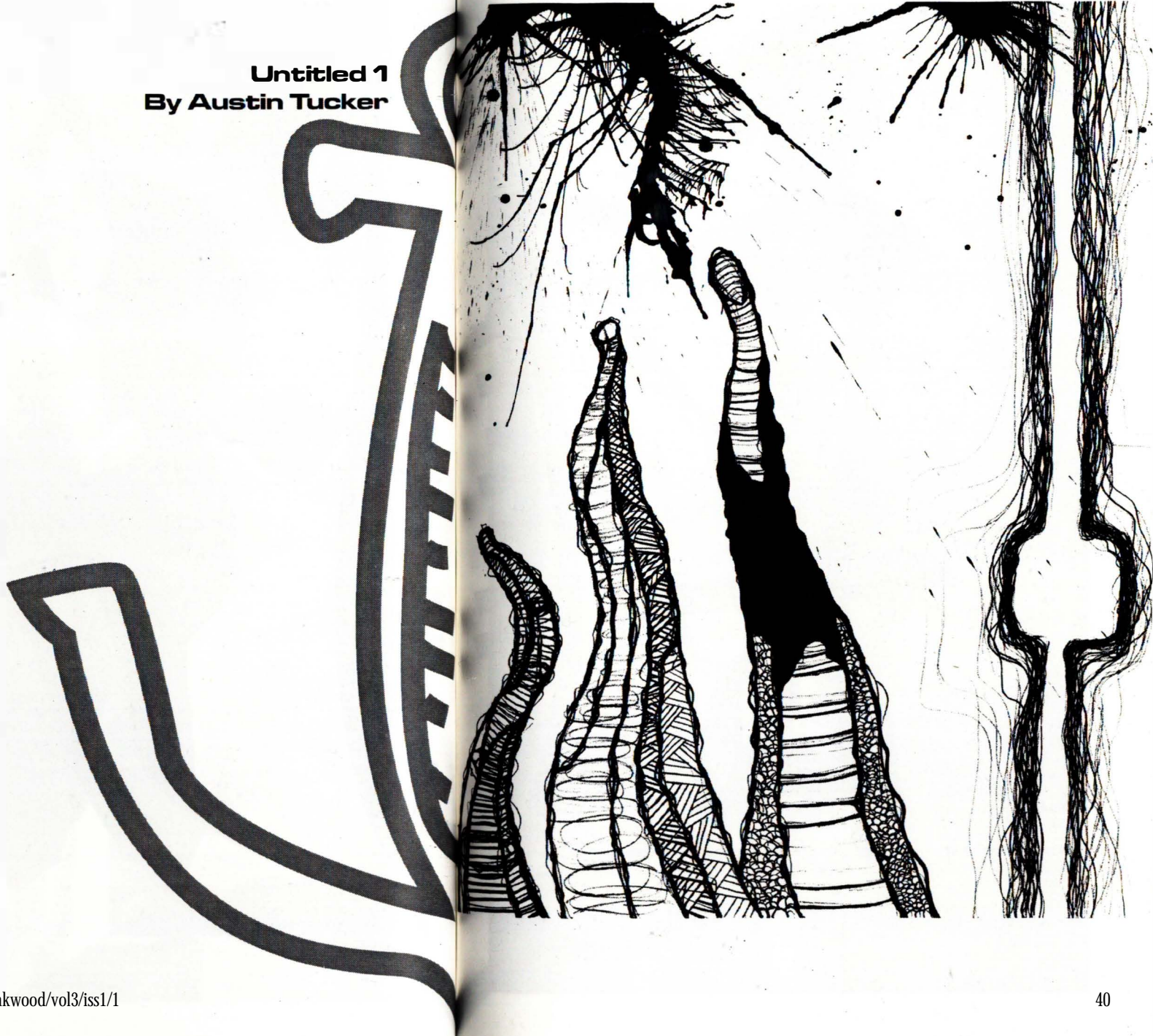


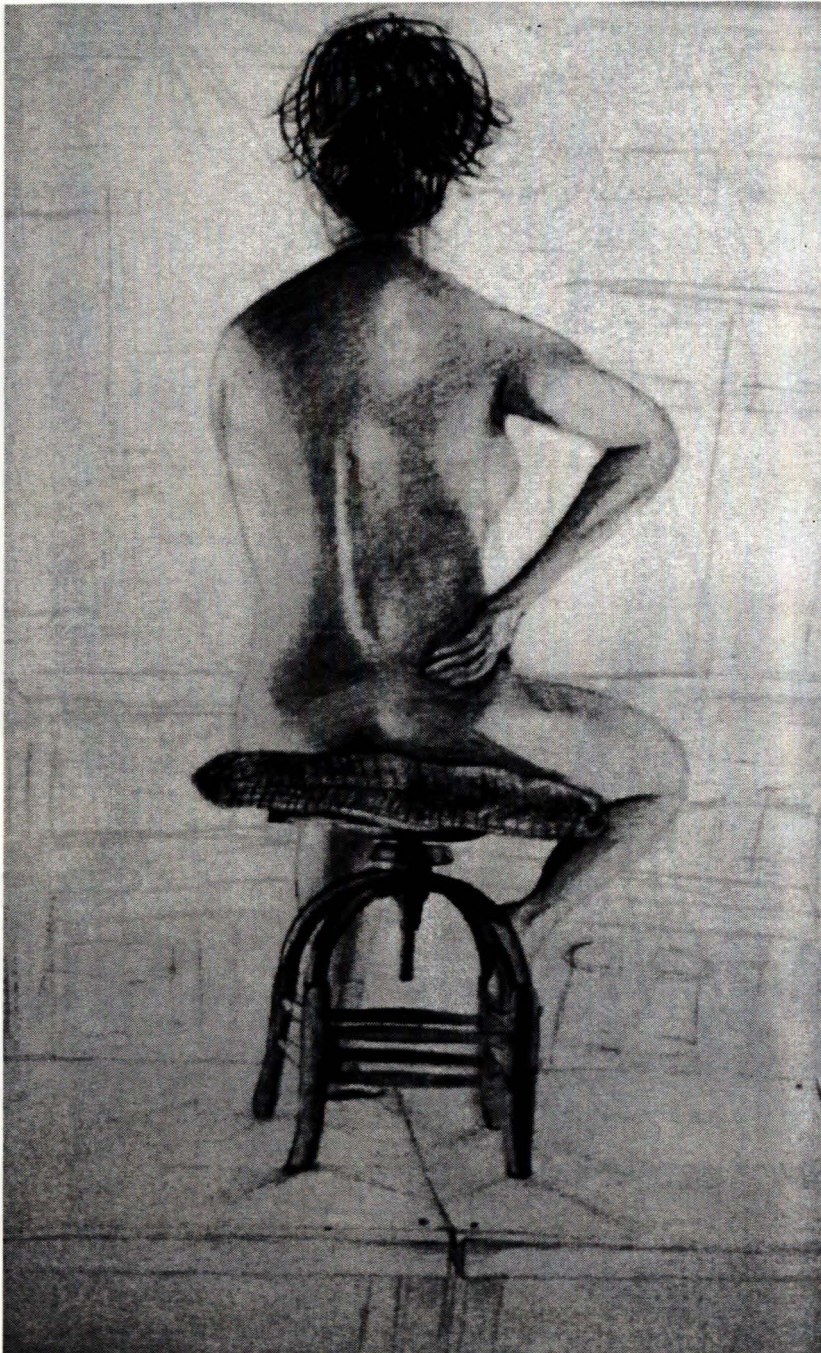


The Mother
By Eileen Hall



Untitled 1
By Austin Tucker

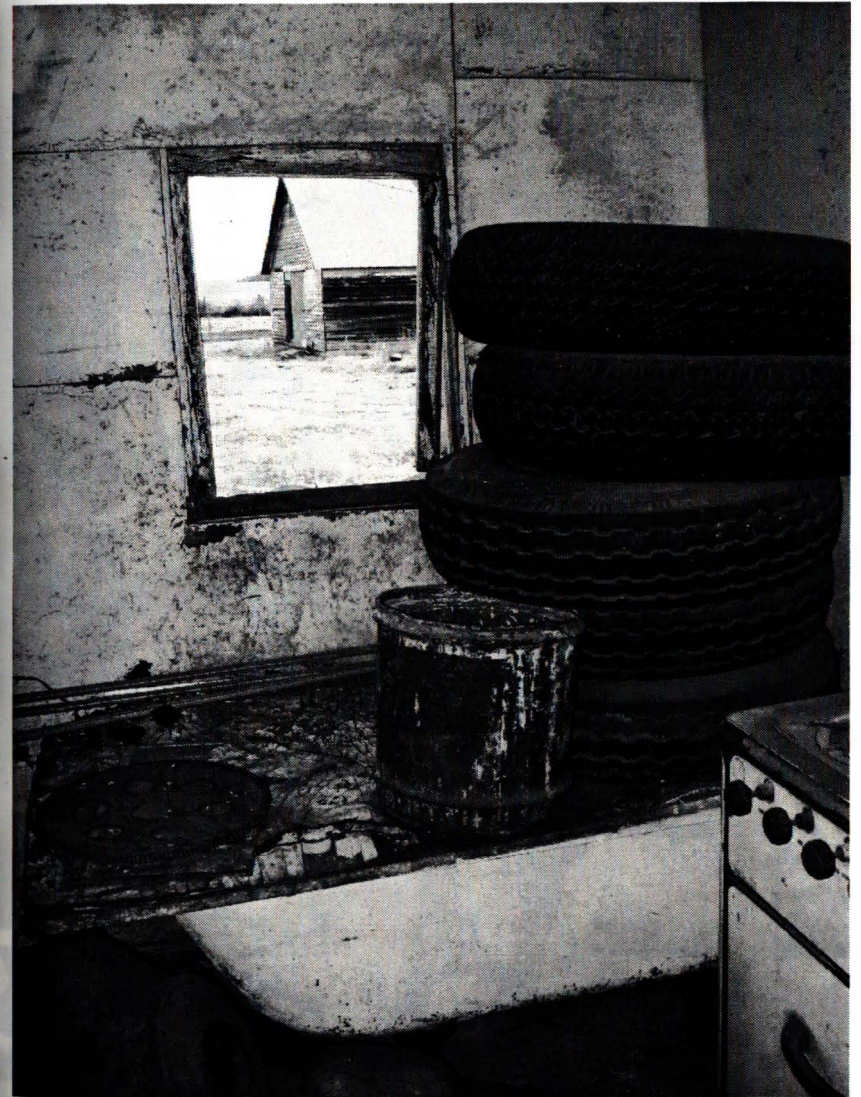




Sitting
By Sarah Kruse



Window
By Katherine Puetz

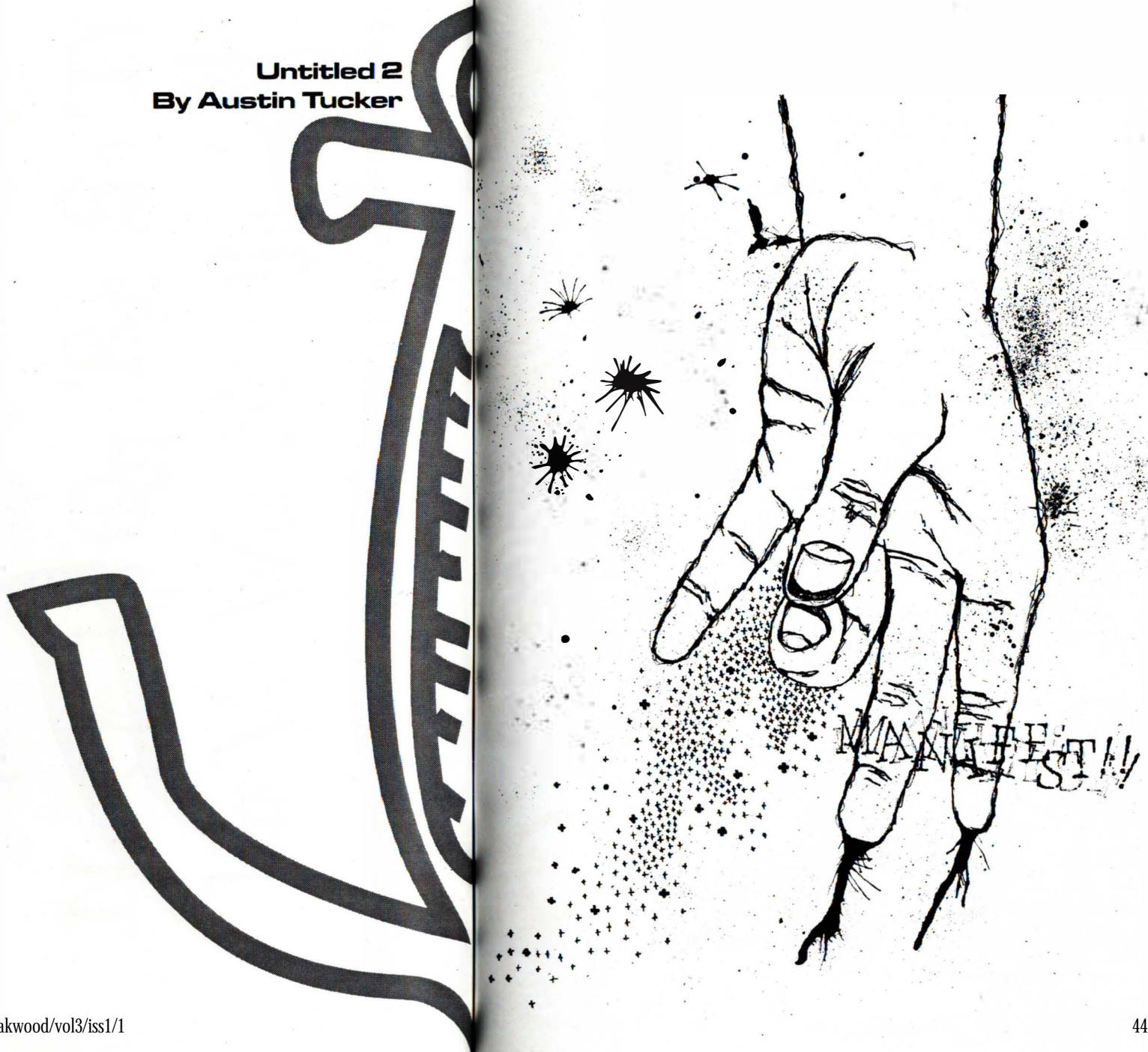


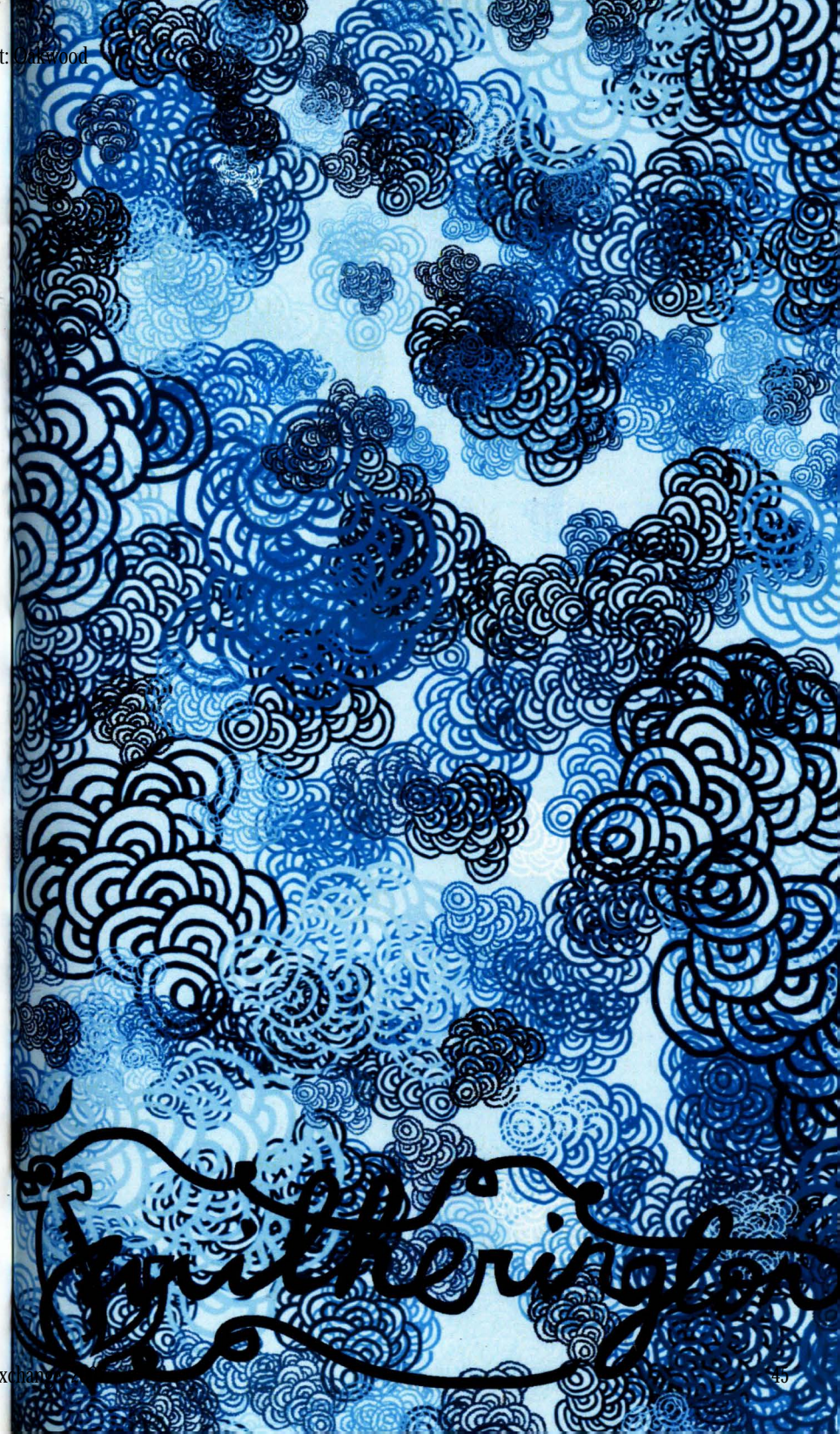
Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff
Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm
Nn Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt
Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

AKS

AKS Typeface
By Erik Rodne

Untitled 2
By Austin Tucker





Society's Lack of Attention **Brianna Lubiens**

Listen closely!

Can you hear me?

I am the beating of a lonely heart,

Ever so faint, yet still audible.

I am the crying of a small babe,

Who's mother is always too busy to love.

I am the trickle of a small stream,

Refusing to all mountains to stop it.

I am the cracking of a whip,

Encouraging a dying horse to trot on.

I am the laughter of a lost lover,

Now happily holding your lost best friend.

I am the sound of footsteps down the hall

When you are trying to remain unnoticed.

And I am the words of someone gone,

Whom you only wish you would have listened to.

Now, Look carefully!

Can you see me?

I am the tears that fall off a broken face,

Landing on shaking hands below.

I am the lightening flashing in the distance,

Illuminating the dreary sky above.

I am a smile plastered on each day

To the torn soul's not-so-perfect face.

I am the delicate, velvet petals

Of a red rose among the thorns.

I am the blood-stained sleeves,

Of your desperate sibling's shirt.

I am the crystal blue water,

Polluted my man's wicked whims.

And I am your very gravestone,

Standing alone in a field of death.
Inaudibly heard, if you're truly listening;
Invisibly seen, if you're honestly looking.

I am the forgotten past,
Terrifying present,
And hopeless future.
Why don't you acknowledge me?

All the Sights and Liquid Grapes **Megan Even**

We thought on all the stars in revolution around our heads,
Waltzed in the gutters, stumbled to our beds.
When the medication phobic claimed he had his fill,
We took his pill, took his pill, took his pill.
The world turned so bright, as if the stars already fell,
Our phobic fretted during the service so we sung "There's no
such thing as hell."
Then the choir members joined in, (I think it was a relief to
them too),
You rosary's too heavy,
You're turning blue, turning blue, turning blue.
Mary slept and smiled as Joseph killed the little birds,
They said "Your brittle head is dancing now and messing with
your words."
Your mouth scorned us in our headless sinning,
But dizzy eyes bring clearer sight
So we kept spinning, spinning, spinning.
All the sights and liquid grapes bewildered our bodies and
made us feel anemic,
Our panicked stomachs filled with butterflies that tickled us
bulimic.
In our sickness I'm convinced we retched up the serpent's
apple,
We wiped our mouths and couldn't decipher between a
corporation and a chapel.
When the sky burned the building into splinters we watched
where we stepped,
When the splinters turned to ashes we fell down
And we slept, and slept, and slept.
The morning drug us along with the apocalyptic news the
satellites transmit,

Your prayer turned into an outburst, a spasm, and a fit.
All the stars collapsed closer and lit up the revolution of the sun,
We joined the phobic and the choir
And we danced, and danced, and danced
Until the world was done.

An Experiment in Schizophrenic Poems (or Poets) James Francis

I write, and words flow from my pen
Giving life to thoughts, bounding into consciousness

Asking

Why are you writing in free verse?

What's a poem without meter?

You

Of all people

Ought

To

Know

You're a poet, for goodness' sake!

And why did you say "pen"

When you're actually writing in pencil?

To which I answer

Pen is more artistic

And I need a break from meter

You're a poem

Don't argue with me!

To which it answers

I am given no choice, for you are my maker

You have mental problems

So I respond

You have a point

I'll just burn you

No more mess

But

The poem shouted

Book burner!

Book burner!

And so found support

So now I must preserve it, and

Perhaps
Do something with it
And it's saying
Ha.
But not I

Controversy at Thanksgiving

Catherine Graves

Thanksgiving was glum for the three college freshmen together, but alone, in the dormitory lounge. All had wonderful memories of the holiday but were too far from home for a four-day break. They sat together for an all but stirring game of Tri-Bond.

Sheila, a New York native, began with a simple card, "Model T, Armstrong, Dr. Pepper". Sheila came from a broken family, living with her mother in a New York apartment until she left for college. Financial straits left her stranded. After many "umms . . .," Kevin, the Canadian, chimed, "Oh! I know. They're all firsts . . . the first mass produced automobile, the first man on the moon, and the first soda." Sheila nodded and passed the cards on.

Kevin read the next card, "Storm, needle, and potato." Sheila piped in, "Tornado! Tornadoes have needles and . . . oh, never mind." Kevin rolled his eyes. Thanksgiving in Canada was in early October and little resembled the American Bacchanal. His petulance left him with no need to discover how his host country celebrated it. His main focus was to move onto the subjective vs. objective nature of reality, the current topic of Philosophy 101. He had always been a firm objective believer. His friend, Fred, begged to differ.

Fred, the lone Texan of the group, was the living gospel of subjective thinking. A professor's nightmare, he perceived things as he wished, not how others tried to teach him. He wasn't fond of Tri-Bond, but overwhelming emptiness lured him into the group. "This game makes no sense," he needled. "Just because the game says an answer is right doesn't make it right!"

With another overly dramatic eye roll, Kevin took the bait. "Oh, here we go again. We'll see the universe in our own way.

One man's manure is another's crepes suzette."

Mary, the usually calm Australian foreign exchange student, became quickly irritated, "You're just bloody annoying!" Mary came to America looking forward to cultural submersion. She never expected to experience these voids amidst the holidays. "All I wanted was a pleasant first Thanksgiving. Does it matter whether or not you believe the game is right? Match the cards' answers!" She read the next card, "Gosling, kit, and Joey."

"Ooh, I know!" chimed in Sheila. "Babies!" They're all baby animals!"

Fred quickly broke the mood. "I can think of a hundred answers equally germane." His rage, however, was disingenuous. While Sheila formulated her answer, Fred hatched a plan to demonstrate that Kevin's objective view could not stand a practical test. He intended to offer, rather than an actual set of Tri-Bond clues, a set of random ones. If the clever Kevin came up with a response, as Fred was sure he would, or if anyone came up with a response to which Kevin did not object, subjectivism would win the day. "Oh, never mind. Here's the next clue: Muskrat. Ponytail Holder. Mentos."

The room quieted for a full minute, an eternity for the sociable young people. Finally, Kevin broke the silence and said, . . .

Asia-America **Nakita Podhradsky**

The Empire Mall up in Sioux Falls opened an Asian shop
But it was not at all like the ones in Denver
That had men with Japanese accents selling
Free Tibet bumper stickers
Because the fate of Tibet doesn't concern Sioux Falls
Instead, there was a wall of swords
And cherry-vanilla incense
And "exotic" bamboo in dolphin candle-holders
That said "Made in China"
Scattered among the rows of fat-Buddha statues
Were wooden carvings of Jesus

Fudge and the Art of Polka

Nakita Podhradsky

A chocolate cupcake with pink frosting walks into the library and goes to the flavor section, between gardening and western romance. The chocolate cupcake adored this section, and would often go to the library just to stand before these shelves and be in cupcake heaven. Standing before the books was like being before brave souls saying, "you're not alone".

She read the titles and knew there were others like her, if not here, then at least somewhere in the world.

"Chocolate: the New Vanilla"

"Fudge and the Art of Polka"

"Charlie and the Chocolate Factory"

It was tough being chocolate in a land of strawberry cupcakes with strawberry frosting and strawberry sprinkles. She knew very, very few who dared to defy the mold, and she saw how they were looked at—those who openly wore smelled of lemon.

Chocolate wasn't that brave. She wore pink frosting and tried to make herself believe she liked it. But she didn't. Still, she wore pink and they believed her.

Then something within Cupcake, perhaps the voices of the books screaming at her that it was okay, made her reach out a little strawberry covered arm and carefully pull out "Chocolatism: A Brief History". It was a very boring, textbook-ish novel—one that would easily be assigned in cooking class when the teacher doesn't really want the students to learn, but to "cover the material". Chocolate walked the long path to the checkout desk—the book held tight against her to hide the cover. She stared up at an old cupcake with cherry-stemmed glasses.

The librarian looked at the book and laughed in the "I hope you aren't serious, and my laughing will make sure you aren't" way.

"Now, you aren't going to turn chocolate on us, are you?"

"No, it's for a paper for school."

Winter
Amira Loveridge

Winter surrounds me. Its cold chills me to the bone, yet is not unwelcome. Delicate snowflakes flutter to the ground gracefully, then land with the multitudes of other frozen droplets that graced the ground before them. The collection lies ahead of me as smooth as ice, flawless. Yet the excitement within me is overwhelming, too strong to be squelched. It's the first big snow of the year!

I play in the snowy heaven for hours on end, throwing tightly packed snowballs at my already howling sister until she runs away, leaving me alone. At least I am free of her! I have this heaven to myself!

I make beautiful snow angels that look so lifelike that it surprises even me. I feel like an angel myself in this pristine place. All the while, I continue spoiling its perfection by sledding down the mountain of snow, even though it's not in my yard. They won't care . . . or notice. The snow flies at my already numb face, its perfectly formed crystals melt in my mouth. And I know I simply must do it again.

Then Mom ruins my fun by forcing me to come in for lunch, an unnecessary and trivial event. When I am allowed to play again, my heaven has been reduced to slush.

Shuffle
Jenny Kee

Shuffle always seems to know,
Which song fits my mood just so.

Music keeps me sane,
When the world seems so plain.
The soundtrack of my life defines me,
And colors in the shapes that I see.
Slow or fast, loud or soft, it doesn't matter,
Each can take my day and erase the chatter.
I never want to be in existence without the fallback,
Of the music that soothes me. O! It has such a knack.

Please take me to a place of my own,
Away from the world, where I am finally alone.

Evil Lurks in the Kitchen

Carisa Anderson

His boot felt empty without the knife. He held the blade in his hand, poised for action. But first, he mustn't forget his cleanliness. Luigi walked over to the sink and washed the knife thoroughly, and then wiped it dry with a paper towel. Now he was ready. He returned to his place behind the counter and raised the knife again. Before him a random assortment of vegetables advanced, all fierce and menacing. Luigi knew what he had to do.

He reached out and grabbed an approaching stalk of broccoli and quickly decapitated it turning the head into so many florets. He then proceeded to take down the lookout by gauging out the potato's many eyes. A head of cabbage attempted to attack him from behind, but Luigi rounded on it and gave it an impromptu lobotomy. After hacking through row of carrots and columns of cucumbers, he threw the evil vegetation into a pan filled with oil. Luigi slowly heated the pan, forcing out all the will left in the menacing vegetables. Soon, the only sound to be heard was the sizzling of oil covering the once fierce warriors.

Luigi cleaned his knife again and slipped it delicately back into his boot. As he was doing this, another man walked into the kitchen. He eyed Luigi warily, glancing from the frying pan to Luigi's boot and back to Luigi's face. Approaching cautiously, he rounded the kitchen until he was across the counter opposite Luigi. They stared at each other silently for a moment, then the stranger spoke.

"Whatta you doin' Luigi?" he quiered.

"What? Me? Nothin'," the chef answered.

"Yeah, nothin'. You playin' like you fightin' with them vegetables again?"

"Nah." Luigi laughed nervously.

"Yeah, so whatta you doin' puttin' that knife in your boot?"

"Safe keepin', Ramon. Never know who's goin' to be sneakin' up on you."

"Uh huh. Who's sneakin' up on you in the kitchen?" Ramon asked.

"Well, you, and uh . . . y'know . . . that, uh, gang across the street . . ."

"Yeah, Mr Torentelli's produce could be attacking any day now."

"You never know," Luigi said sulkily.

"Just gimme the knife, Luigi, before you go hurtin' yourself."

Takini
Sam Mendoza

When I see Takini from a distance, it's small with little movement, few people, some may even say there is just nothing at all. When I look from a distance at the town, there are only about thirty houses, one big brick building, which is the school, and another building, known as the blue building. There are red trailers for the students to work in (the classrooms for the high school). Here is a word of advice, if you like to drive fast, don't blink or you might miss the turn and the town all together.

When I stand outside and just listen, there are a number of things always going on out in the prairie. For one thing, I can hear the little kids running around when it's nice out, back and forth, playing tag or hide-and-go-seek. I may hear the coyotes, in the wild, that are chasing the poor innocent foxes, or the balls bouncing over at the basketball courts, over by the school, from the guys playing hard games of 21. The last thing I can hear is the kids, who live in housing, who turn their music up loud, when their parents are gone to Rapid City for the night, or have gone to a board meeting.

The things in Takini that I feel are the dry, grimy, loose dirt that is all over this little town. The wind which is always blowing, and the little pebbles that blow against my legs and arms, the pebbles that can really hurt.

When others look at Takini from a distance, they may just see Takini as small, with no movement, no people, no sounds, and no sense of feeling.

I Am From . . .
Melissa Ortiz

I am from a family disaster . . . tragedy . . . and sorrow.
Piercing numbness and destruction of a 9 year old's heart.
Her pain is my pain that swallows us whole like a gigantic
monster created
by those who claim to love us.

I am from struggling innocence.
Depletedness of the mind burnt out of my brain by constant
whining of

Backstabbing adults within our society who feed off of the
mistakes we make, and the lives they could live through us.

I am from parents who act like children; they complain on the
complications of their lives.
But when I complain I get the usual, "life isn't fair" speech.

I am from people . . . from the affects that people have on my
life. I am from
siblings who adore me, to friends who use me. I am from
enemies who hate
me, and people who don't even know me. I am from a man
who loves me,
And a family that embraces me. I am from my best friend of
five years, who
teaches me life should just be lived.

I am from the few women left in this generation who turn
away from
tabloids and clichés.

The ones who look down on those that live for substance
abuse and dreams

of size zero bodies due to anorexia.

I am from people . . .

Those who make me hypocritical, those who show me
unconformity.

I come from entertainment, from talent and creativity. I teach
my siblings
to be themselves, to not be afraid to show who they are. Even
though I
struggle with the same obstacles.

I am from a place with dry grounds and tall thirsty grass.

Cold winters, and blistering summers.

I am from a Hispanic father and a Caucasian mother.

I am from a world that traps me under the needs of others,
one that shows
me I have no heart.

I feel nothing for where I am from.

Sisters, where are your hearts?

Alysha Weiler

Sisters, listen to your soul deep within. What is it saying?

Sisters,

Where is your character?

Where is your unique self? Why won't you let your true
self shine? Your true gifts? Your true talents? Overcome the
voice to conform; be who you were meant to be.

Sisters,

Where is your beauty?

Where is your true beauty? The beauty that illuminates
your integrity, your truthfulness,
your confidence, your love, your mystery. Where is the beauty
that comes from within your heart?

Sisters,

Where is your strength?

Who said women can't have power, can't be a leader, can't
make a difference in this
world? Why do you listen to those voices? Take hold of your
warrior spirit before it fades.

Sisters,

Where is your sense for adventure?

Why do you let others conform you?

Why do you hide your true self? Hold you head high and
believe that your true self is
good. Walk through those paths that intimidate with courage.

Sisters,

Where is your passion?

The passion you were created with? Where is that inner
fire that was once lit? Won't you light it up once again?
Won't you imagine the results? Listen to that quiet, but deep
yearning within your soul. What is it saying? What are the
longings of your heart?

Why are you satisfied with your life as it is? Don't you believe
there is more to life? That
you can actually live?
Sisters, listen to your soul deep within. What is it saying?

**The Secret Diary of a High School
Freshman who was Thrown into a
Large, metal Garbage Bin—Located
at the Back of the School—by Three
Seniors After Making Fun of One of
Their Moms . . .
Brian Larson**

Day 1 – I am never going to compare somebody's mom to a nine-foot sasquatch ever again. It's really dark in here. I think my nose is bleeding. My head hurts. It's hard to breathe. It smells bad. I hope this pencil is working. Is this even a pencil? It feels like one. There appears to be a rubber tip, it must be the eraser. Yeah, this has got to be a pencil. I assume I'm either writing on a sheet of paper or a really thin sheet of human flesh. I can hear people laughing outside. From the sound of it, they're throwing heavy objects on the top of the garbage bin. They've been doing this for like . . . thirty minutes. I really hate this. I can't wait for them to leave so I can get out of here.

Day 2 – After shouting for help for nearly six hours, a random passerby was kind enough to inform me that the seniors tossed seventy-two cement blocks on the top of the garbage bin. He said he was late for work so he couldn't help me. The only place to work around here is the school though. Maybe he was a teacher? You would think a teacher would get help right away though. How did he manage to count seventy-two cement blocks just by glancing at them? I'm really hungry. Lucky for me, I found an un-opened snack pack. I could really use some chocolate pudding at this point.

Day 3 – Whatever it was I ate, I don't think it was chocolate pudding. I feel really sick now. The stupid guy never came back. I really feel like killing someone. Something is crawling up my pants but I am desperate for physical contact, so I don't think I'll do anything about it. I really have to take a leak, so I'm thinking of going in the very corner of the garbage bin within the next two hours. I think I'll sleep for a little bit after I eat this goo I found in a plastic bag. I'm guessing it's ice-cream but I could be wrong like the last time.

Day 4 – I continued to try to get somebody to help me, but our school is pretty much located in the middle of no where, so it isn't really working. I found an old pair of shoes today and played with them a bit. I pulled the strings out of them. After awhile, I threw the shoe across the garbage bin and apparently hit somebody because I heard somebody whisper, "Ouch." I think I'm not the only one in here. I'm really scared now. I'm just going to shut up, stay where I'm at and eat some more goo. My pencil got a little dull so like anybody would do in those dramatic survival movies, I scratched my skin until I started to bleed and now I'm writing in my own blood. I feel like I've accomplished something today.

Day 5 – I was mad today. The guy came back and said he brought a friend to help lift the cement blocks off this garbage . . . Then I realized it was one of the guys who originally threw me in here in the first place. He asked if I was still alive, I told him "yes". He said he'd come back to ask the same question in a couple of weeks and left. I tried to use my feet to push the cement blocks off the garbage, but I ended up pushing myself deeper into all the trash that I'm surrounded by. I don't care too much though. Like the old saying goes, "Another man's trash is another man's home". No wait . . . I think it was

Day 6 – So I ran into that guy that I threw a shoe at. He said I need to keep my distance. I assume he's mad at me because of the whole shoe thing. I think I'm going to kill him somehow and use his human skeleton as a tool to bust out of here. I wish I could get a fire started in here. I'm cold. No wait, that would be a bad idea. Maybe I can use the other guy's flaming corpse to protect me. I don't know anymore.

Day 7 – I tried to kill the guy with a plastic spoon I found earlier but he knocked me out with a brick. I need to find something better than brick. I don't have any more goo to eat; I need to eat that guy.

Day 8 – I tried to suffocate the guy with the plastic bag that used to have my goo in it. He threw me off and poked my eyeball. I really hate that guy.

Day 9 – So today I approached the guy and he told me to back off or he'd kill me, so I backed off. I wonder where he put his brick.

Day 10 – The garbage man came today, I heard his truck. I assume he was going to dump all the trash in here into is truck, but apparently he saw all the concrete blocks and decided to leave instead. Lazy garbage man. I was really hungry and asked the guy who's in here if he could tell me where to find something to eat that isn't goo. He told me to go choke on some trash and form the shifting noise he made, I have a feeling he gave me the finger. I told him his mom was a nine-foot sasquatch and he tried to crawl through the trash to beat me up again, but I threw a sack full of newspapers at him and escaped.

Day 11 – My life is really boring. I found a metal pipe today.

I'm going to taunt that guy for fun . . .

Day 12 – I found some more goo today. That guy beat me up good. I think I have a black eye. That's about it.

Day 13 – One of the seniors came back and asked if I was alive. I didn't respond this time, hoping he would take the cement blocks off the garbage bin so he could open the lid so I could punch him in the face and beat him with the metal pipe I found for the purpose of getting out of here, but ended up leaving. So, I guess I'm going to mess with that guy until I get out of here or until he kills me. I've lost a lot of blood. If anybody just so happens to find this, look to see if some other guy is in here and beat him up with a metal pipe for me. I would greatly appreciate it. Peace.

Confessions

Cody Hull

I'll admit it, when Lion King comes on
My heart jumps for joy.

The Aristocats is one of my favorite movies,
My Disney collection is astounding.

So I stole a pair of my ex-girlfriend's pants
I can't help it they are amazingly comfortable
Plus they make my butt look delicious.
And who doesn't like feeling delicious?

And I'm not afraid to say,
I have taken a shower lying down.
It may not really get you clean,
But sometimes standing isn't an option

I have worked my ass off to get out of work
I have used twice the energy it would take to finish my job
To avoid it,
But I didn't have to work

I have sabotaged someone's Lysterine with urine
Just because I didn't like them
Don't worry it kills 99.99% of bacteria.
I wonder how it affects flavor?

I have stolen friends' jokes
If no one is around to say I stole it then it's mine,
That makes me original and funny,
As long as it is new people in the room.

I Am From . . .
Kaylee Foster

I am from . . .

I am from a dark place,
Unknown and without a name
Where in your dreams it appears
It's full of haunting memories and ungodly tales

I am from a place where smiles are not existent
Where hugs were hidden
And kisses a thing of the past

I am from a place where there is death and
crying
Prison and freedom
A place where the word "normal" is a lie

I am from a place where friends lie and steal
Backstab and shit talk
Where the goal is to belittle and beat down

I am from a place where a crime is a "norm"
Drugs are the pastime
And jail is just an inconvenience

I am from a place where one year in prison is
nothing
But five is a lifetime

I am from a place where girls are known by their
boys' last names

And guys are called homeboys

A place where you think you need a weapon to
survive

And fighting is a necessity.
But all you really need is a brain

I am from a place . . .



